

# ROMAN LOOSE CHANGE

Long, long ago, many centuries before the village of Chaddesden ever came into being, countless Roman legionaries and civilians tramped through this patch of countryside, for today's busy Nottingham Road is a route of considerable antiquity. For much of its course through Chaddesden it runs along the line of the former Roman road from Sawley to the fort and later civil settlement of *Derventio* – the Roman predecessor of Derby at Little Chester.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the Romans actually built their first Derby fort at Strutt's Park, on the high ground of the Belper Road area to the west of the River Derwent soon after AD 50, perhaps during the reign of that most infamous of Roman rulers, the Emperor Nero (AD 54–68).<sup>1</sup>

This fort was seemingly one of a series of garrisons arranged on a rough east to west basis sited close by the River Trent or its tributaries and designed to guard the southern approaches to what was then the territory of the Brigantes, for although Cartimandua<sup>2</sup>, their queen, was a valued ally of Rome, the same could not be said of other Brigantian factions who resented the new Roman invaders.<sup>3</sup> The military occupation of Strutt's Park was short-lived and came to an end c.AD 80 when a new fort was established about a quarter of a mile away at Little Chester on the east bank of the River Derwent. Nearer still to Chaddesden, on land later to become the Racecourse, the Romans constructed an industrial site complete with metalworking furnaces, pottery kilns, etc., as well as a cemetery complex of the second to third centuries AD.<sup>4</sup>

Given the proximity of Chaddesden to all this early activity, it might be thought surprising that no significant Roman remains appear to have been unearthed here in recent times, particularly bearing in mind all the construction work involved in building so many thousands of houses in the twentieth century. Archaeological remains, however, are often buried a considerable depth below present



*Specimen photograph of a silver denarius of the Emperor Vespasian (Attribution: Photographer Alan Roche, © American Numismatic Society, via [Wikimedia Commons](#) CC0 1.0).*

ground level and do not always come to light during the excavation of modern foundation trenches and suchlike. Finds of Roman material often occur in the vicinity of their roads, and the only known discovery in modern times was that of a solitary silver coin of Vespasian (reigned AD 69–79), perhaps something like the example pictured above. The Chaddesden coin was found c.1967 by the brook at the north-east end of Chaddesden Park, just a few minutes' walk from Nottingham Road, which as previously stated, follows the line of the Roman route to Little Chester.<sup>5</sup>

- 1 Dool, J., 1985. 'Excavations at Strutt's Park, Derby, 1974', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, Vol. 105, p.25.
- 2 Cartimandua ruled the Brigantes about AD 43–69.
- 3 Brassington, M., 1991. *Roman Derby*, Derby, p.9.
- 4 Dool, J., 'Derby Racecourse: "Excavations on the Roman Industrial Settlement, 1974"', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, Vol. 105, pp. 155–221. Wheeler, H., 1985. 'The Racecourse Cemetery', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, Vol. 105, pp.222–280.
- 5 Derbyshire County Council, Historic Environment Record (formerly Sites & Monuments Record), Find Spot record MDR4540, OS Grid Ref: SK 383369. *East Midlands Archaeological Bulletin*, Vol.10, 1974, p.5.

In contrast to this solitary twentieth-century find, the notes of a little-known historian provide a tantalisingly incomplete account of the discovery of many Roman coins at Chaddesden more than three hundred years previously.

One of the earliest writers on Derbyshire history was Philip Kinder (1597–c.1665), who claimed descent from an old Derbyshire family, the Kinders of Kinder Head near Hayfield. Kinder was apparently planning the compilation of a full county history, and on 20 February 1663 he put the finishing touches to his ‘Prolusion’ or preparatory essay. Apart from this general introduction to his planned *Historie of Darby-shire*, Kinder never worked again on his book and died soon afterwards. His original manuscript still survives in the Bodleian Library at Oxford amongst the papers given to the library by Elias Ashmole (1617–1692), the Lichfield-born antiquary.<sup>6</sup> His text can be extremely hard to decipher as the ink has bled through the paper in numerous places, but with patience it is still possible to read how Kinder – writing in the quaint and sometimes difficult prose of his time – speculated about the fate of the early inhabitants of the county after the Roman invasion of AD 43, and discoursed about the places in which their new imperial masters built fortifications ...

In ye common commotions & universall conquests, they have submitted with ye rest that / ye Catholick conquest of ye Romans over whelmed all ye Realme & amongst ye rest this Darby sh[ire] / it is no doubt; but where their sconces, garisons & fortifications should be raised here is ye / dispute. Little Chester (as a peculier or Counter-castle to Magna Chester in ye wall near / Hault-Wessell) by ye Roman monies thier found, seems to be a Colonie of ye Roman sould- / jers (for soe ye name may import from Castrum: But I would not have every place / where such coine is found to be a garison; for then why not Chadston a neighbor- / ing towne where greate plentie have been turned up, in ye Custodie of M.R.W. / Lord of ye Soile, neither doe I beleeve yt ye Romans hoarded up all thier monies to them- / selves, but made use of it for exchange & barter & soe ye Subjects commonly had as / greate a shear [share] ...<sup>7</sup>

Note: Parentheses in the original text are represented by round brackets ( ). Modern additions are enclosed in square brackets [ ]. Line breaks in the original are marked by a diagonal line.

So much for Kinder’s brief mention of Chaddesden, or Chadston as he calls it, but what is he actually telling us? First of all, an explanation of some of his words and phrases may not come amiss:

*Sconce* – A small earthwork

*Little Chester (as a Peculier or Counter-castle to Magna Chester in ye wall near Hault-Wessell)* – Kinder thought that Little Chester at Derby was so-named to differentiate it from the Roman fort of *Aesica* at Great (or Magna) Chesters on Hadrian’s Wall, about 2 miles north of Haltwhistle in Northumberland.

*in ye custodie of M.R.W. Lord of ye Soile* – presumably a reference to Mr. Wilmot of Chaddesden; most likely Robert Wilmot (died 1638), or one of his two sons, Robert and Edward Wilmot. *Lord of ye Soile* simply means lord of a particular estate.

Kinder cautions his readers that not every place in which Roman coins are found should be construed as a ‘Colonie of ye Roman souldjers’. To support this rather obvious assertion, he contrasts Little Chester, which he correctly identifies as a Roman garrison, with Chaddesden where ‘great plentie’ of coins have been discovered.

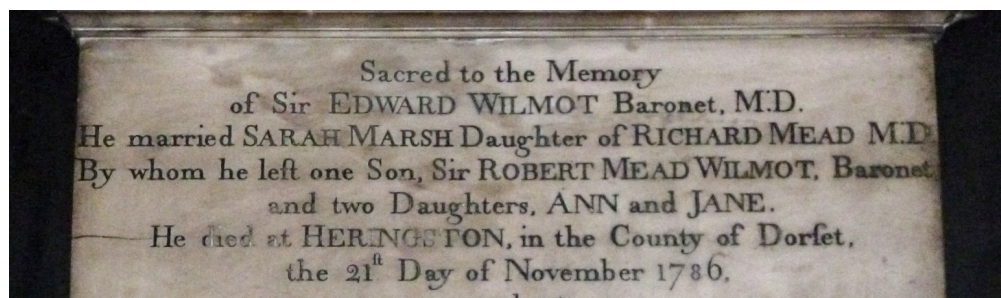
Regrettably, Kinder is all too brief when describing the Chaddesden find, surely one of the earliest ever reported in Derbyshire. How many coins were unearthed? Were they all found in one place

6 A copy of the original was made in June 1870 and is now in Derby Local Studies Library, (No.3883). An earlier copy of 1715 can be seen in Derbyshire Record Office (D258/55/8).

7 This is a transcript of the original document in the Bodleian Library (MS Ashmole 788, fol.201).

and at just one particular point in time, or were the coins scattered far and wide and found over many years? Were they associated with any other remains? For the answers to these questions we read Kinder's notes in vain. He was, after all, writing as an amateur historian in the reign of King Charles II, not as an archaeologist in the twenty-first century! Indeed, it may well be that Kinder had never seen the coins for himself, but simply relied on the information of others. Neither do we know if the coins were all from the same period of Roman history, and what subsequently happened to them after they were apparently placed in the custody of Mr. Wilmot.

If the Roman coins were retained by the Wilmot family of Chaddesden Hall then it is possible they eventually ended up in the vast collection of Dr. Richard Mead (1673–1754), physician and



enthusiastic antiquarian, for he was the father-in-law of Sir Edward Wilmot (1st Bt., 1693–1786) and is actually mentioned by name on Sir Edward's memorial in St. Mary's Church (see picture). After Dr. Mead's death, his coins, books, pictures and antiquities were sold for

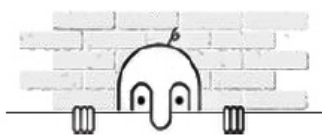
**Sir Edward Wilmot's memorial in Chaddesden Church.**

£16,069 – a colossal price for those days.<sup>8</sup> Of course, the most important question that Kinder leaves unanswered is also the most obvious one. Where were the coins found?

I have often wondered whether the Roman coins described by Kinder in the seventeenth century all came from a single hoard at Chaddesden or not. Kinder, you will recall, merely tells us that 'greate plentie have been turned up'. Whilst his phraseology might imply the coins were discovered over a prolonged period of time, they could equally well have been from a solitary cache of coins hidden for safekeeping by a Roman citizen; if this latter is the case then it is unlikely any more remain to be found. However, if a small Roman or Romano-British settlement once existed in Chaddesden, other artefacts may still be unearthed in the future.

By way of a postscript to this article, I remember – sometime around 1964 – my father telling me of a conversation he had had with one of the local policemen then living in the Police Houses on Wood Road. If I recall correctly, the policeman told the tale of an incident in which some ancient coins had been found in or near Chapel Lane. Is it possible he was somehow describing the same find of coins written up by Kinder all those centuries ago?<sup>9</sup> If so, then his informant was able to add to Kinder's narrative by giving Chapel Lane as the location. On the balance of probability, though, it seems far more likely that these are two entirely separate finds made very many years apart and in different locations.

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<sup>8</sup> These items were sold on various dates between November 1754 and March 1755. It took eight days to sell just the coins, which made £1,977 (*Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, John Nichols, Volume 6, Part 1, London, 1812, p.218-9).

<sup>9</sup> Then again, maybe the policeman was simply referring to the find of the solitary silver denarius mentioned previously.